

March 1, 2016

The Honorable Thomas Wheeler
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

On February 4, 2016, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation's Communications, Technology, Innovation, and the Internet Subcommittee held a hearing entitled "*Ensuring Intermodal Universal Service Fund Support for Rural America*" where we, along with many of our colleagues, expressed our frustration with the inability of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to accurately measure mobile broadband coverage available to consumers, especially in rural areas. There is an obvious disconnect between official FCC statistics and our own and our constituents' real-world experiences, and we urge you to work with stakeholders to identify more accurate ways to measure available mobile wireless coverage.

In 2014, the FCC declared that over 99% of the U.S. population was covered by some form of mobile broadband technology. Independent studies, however, indicate that the reality in our states is dramatically different than the FCC narrative. For example, one study found that wireless coverage in rural communities can be as low as 77% in West Virginia and 81% in North Carolina. The 2016 Broadband Progress Report acknowledges the limitations that prevent the FCC from reporting geographic areas that lack advanced mobile services with reliable accuracy. We believe that you must partner with industry and other stakeholders to solve this problem. We cannot afford to ignore it any longer.

Universal service – the idea that all Americans, regardless of age, income, and area code, should have access to essential communications services – has been the foundation of federal communications policy since the inception of the FCC. Not that long ago, this required running a landline to each home. Today, with nearly half of all U.S. households solely reliant on cellphones, universal service means ensuring access to both fixed and mobile broadband service. Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to working with you to fulfill our responsibility to the American people.

Sincerely,



Joe Manchin III
United States Senator



Cory Gardner
United States Senator

Kelly A. Ayotte

Kelly Ayotte
United States Senator

Deb Fischer

Deb Fischer
United States Senator

Gary C. Peters

Gary C. Peters
United States Senator

Amy Klobuchar

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

Jerry Moran

Jerry Moran
United States Senator

Brian Schatz

Brian Schatz
United States Senator

Steve Daines

Steve Daines
United States Senator



OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

April 4, 2016

The Honorable Jerry Moran
United States Senate
521 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Moran:

Thank you for your letter stressing the importance of accurately measuring mobile broadband coverage across the country.

As you note, universal service has been foundational to federal communications policy. As more and more households rely on mobile devices, the FCC must have reliable data on mobile broadband coverage. Let me assure you that the Commission is currently working to improve how we measure mobile coverage.

In the past, we have confronted several challenges in our attempts to measure coverage in a way that matches up with the public's real-world experiences. The biggest of these challenges involved the process of data collection. For the past several years, the Commission relied on data that came from states via the National Telecommunications Information Agency – data that was used in the National Broadband Map – and third party commercial vendors. For a variety of reasons, the data collected by the states and third party commercial vendors did not always accurately reflect the real world experiences of your constituents.

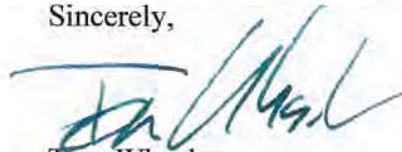
Recognizing the need to improve our mobile coverage data, the Commission adopted an order in 2013 that required mobile wireless data collection from one of the most reliable sources available -- the mobile wireless carriers themselves. As a result the Commission is now collecting coverage data directly from wireless carriers through the Commission's Form 477. Each carrier that submits data must certify to its accuracy. We expect the data wireless carriers provide through these submissions will be more accurate than our previous data because it comes directly from the entity that is deploying the wireless facilities. We are in the relatively early stages of collecting this new coverage data from wireless carriers through the revised FCC Form 477, and Commission staff are currently analyzing these filings.

In addition, please rest assured that, given the importance of this issue, the Commission remains open to working with stakeholders regarding additional data sources, including new third party sources, and methods that we can employ to obtain more reliable information on mobile broadband coverage. Further, it will always be the case that any mobile broadband coverage data will be affected by certain issues that inherently affect wireless services, such as indoor coverage and terrain, which limits as a technical matter the ability to represent precise coverage down to a street segment or address level.

The Commission is also seeking to provide greater public accessibility into the data it collects. Specifically, to better serve the American public, the Commission is seeking additional funds in the upcoming fiscal year to provide improved mapping capabilities of mobile coverage data. Unfortunately, in the past two fiscal years the Commission was not successful in securing funding requests that would have enabled us to update the National Broadband Map. As a result, the data reflected on that map is now outdated. The Commission's budget request for fiscal year 2017 would allow us to use the data collected from the Form 477s to create new user-friendly maps that can be made publicly available. With these additional resources, the Commission will better enable the public to let the Commission know when their user experiences on the ground do not match up with the data collected from Form 477.

It is my hope that these efforts will improve the Commission's ability to accurately measure mobile broadband coverage throughout the country. Thank you for the opportunity to address this important issue. I share your goal of providing access to essential communications for all Americans, and we are committed to policies that achieve the goal of universal service.

Sincerely,



Tom Wheeler



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

April 4, 2016

The Honorable Kelly Ayotte
United States Senate
144 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Ayotte:

Thank you for your letter stressing the importance of accurately measuring mobile broadband coverage across the country.

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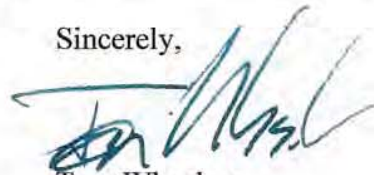
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Tom Wheeler



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

April 4, 2016

The Honorable Steve Daines
United States Senate
320 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Daines:

Thank you for your letter stressing the importance of accurately measuring mobile broadband coverage across the country.

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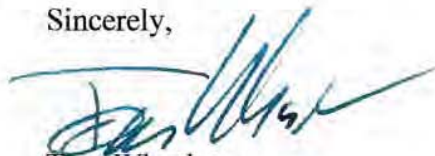
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Tom Wheeler



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

April 4, 2016

The Honorable Deb Fischer
United States Senate
454 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Fischer:

Thank you for your letter stressing the importance of accurately measuring mobile broadband coverage across the country.

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Sincerely,



Tom Wheeler



OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

April 4, 2016

The Honorable Cory Gardner
United States Senate
354 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Gardner:

Thank you for your letter stressing the importance of accurately measuring mobile broadband coverage across the country.

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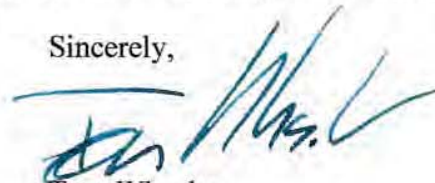
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Sincerely,



Tom Wheeler



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

April 4, 2016

The Honorable Amy Klobuchar
United States Senate
302 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Klobuchar:

Thank you for your letter stressing the importance of accurately measuring mobile broadband coverage across the country.

As you note, universal service has been foundational to federal communications policy. As more and more households rely on mobile devices, the FCC must have reliable data on mobile broadband coverage. Let me assure you that the Commission is currently working to improve how we measure mobile coverage.

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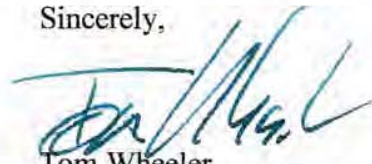
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Sincerely,



Tom Wheeler



OFFICE OF
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

April 4, 2016

The Honorable Joe Manchin
United States Senate
306 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Manchin:

Thank you for your letter stressing the importance of accurately measuring mobile broadband coverage across the country.

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tom Wheeler", with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Tom Wheeler



OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

April 4, 2016

The Honorable Gary Peters
United States Senate
724 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Peters:

Thank you for your letter stressing the importance of accurately measuring mobile broadband coverage across the country.

As you note, universal service has been foundational to federal communications policy. As more and more households rely on mobile devices, the FCC must have reliable data on mobile broadband coverage. Let me assure you that the Commission is currently working to improve how we measure mobile coverage.

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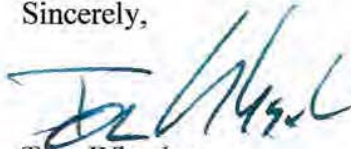
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Tom Wheeler



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

April 4, 2016

The Honorable Brian Schatz
United States Senate
722 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Schatz:

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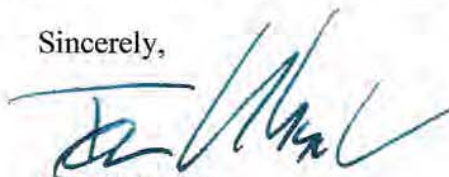
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